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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 26, 1971

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN...

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Group Concerning Prisoners of War and Missing in Action

Several weeks ago we formed an informal group from State, Defense and the White House staff to meet regularly on the subject of prisoners of war and missing in action in Southeast Asia. The principal purpose of this group is to coordinate all efforts within the Administration to insure that all are aware of existing policy, policy changes, activities on behalf of the prisoners and public relations efforts.

To date the group has discussed and proposed a number of themes which have been furnished to the Paris negotiating team for use in their negotiations. Last week a broad outline of appropriate topics was sent to Ambassador Bruce for use during the next several sessions. These guidelines hit hard at the obvious areas of vulnerability of the Communist position. Specifically, repatriation of sick and wounded, lack of information concerning prisoners captured in South Vietnam and Laos, and discrepancies in lists released to Senators Fulbright and Kennedy and certain foreign governments. These talking points will be updated as appropriate.

One of the principal benefits to be derived from this group is insuring that all within the Administration concerned with the prisoner and MIA issue speak the same language when dealing with the problem, particularly with regard to Congressional and general public inquiries.

The group has strongly emphasized the news media and public relations aspect of this issue within the United States. For example, Reader's Digest will do a major article in which the Geneva Convention is given careful scrutiny and dissection in the light of the North Vietnamese treatment of POWs and the lack of information regarding those missing in action.

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By VBD NARA Date 3/27/00

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In the same vein, efforts are made to have leading figures speak out at every opportunity on this matter. As an example, the forthcoming American Red Cross Convention in Washington, D.C. offers a good forum for you to make a major humanitarian address which could highlight the plight of our POWs and MIA. This proposal will be formally submitted for consideration.

General Chappie James reported last week to the group that he has received an overwhelmingly favorable response from the POW/MIA wives and families to your press conference comments stating complete withdrawal was contingent upon release of the prisoners. I think that this more than any other recent development will help the morale of the families of those held prisoner and missing.

I believe that forming this group and having regular meetings has produced several significant beneficial effects. First of all, the involved agencies within the Administration are aware of all current matters which pertain to the prisoners of war and missing in action. Next, sponsoring this group from the White House and meeting here is direct evidence of your great interest in the matter and has stimulated renewed activities within the Department of Defense and Department of State. Finally, I feel that overall regular meetings of this group will produce new and better ideas with which the Administration can pursue its efforts on behalf of the prisoners and missing in action.

GENERAL JAMES D. HUGHES

Good job — Don

H — what we lack here is enough P.R. — or this — just a P.R. man on this to tell what we are doing

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